

Drumthwacket, Italianate Garden  
344 Stockton Street  
Princeton  
Mercer County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-903

HABS  
NJ,  
11-PRINT,  
26-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN AND DESCRIPTIVE HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DRUMTHWACKET, ITALIANATE GARDEN

HABS No. NJ-903

Location: 344 Stockton Street (U.S. Route 206), Princeton,  
Mercer County, N.J.

USGS Princeton Quadrangle, New Jersey. Universal  
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.527620.4465260

Present Owner: State of New Jersey

Present Use: Garden for Governor's Executive Mansion

Significance: The Italianate Garden at Drumthwacket is an early example of a movement in garden design that existed in the United States at the turn of the century and lasted throughout World War I. This movement incorporated classical elements similar to the Beaux Arts movement current in buildings of the period. The garden's original owner, Moses Taylor Pyne, was an influential member of Princeton University's Board of Trustees and utilized the garden as a gathering place for family, friends, and associates. He also had the garden open to the townspeople for their enjoyment and use as a public park. The Italianate Garden was notable in its day and was an integral part of the Drumthwacket estate which is a fine example of the great American estates of the gilded age during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A. Physical History:

1. Date of construction: 1898. Photograph of Drumthwacket in office of Henry R. Fell Company, Trenton, New Jersey (originally Arthur Moon & Henry Fell) is dated October 30, 1898 and has contractors listed.
2. Landscape Architect: Daniel W. Langton. (Who Was Who in America, vol. 1, p. 704) Langton was born in Kemper County, Mississippi on May 5, 1864. He studied at the University of Alabama in 1882 and received his Ph.D. in 1891. He became an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at the University in 1889. He later moved to Morristown, New Jersey and began a landscape architecture practice in New York City. On January 4, 1899, he became one of the eleven charter members of the American Society of Landscape Architects. "He was the Society's first secretary; but failing eyesight compelled him to relinquish his post, and

ultimately his practice as well. He is known to have worked on the estate "Constitution Hill" across the street from Drumthwacket in 1897. Some of his gardens had achieved public notice in the middle 1890's, and the memorial minute adopted by the ASLA after his sudden death on June 20, 1909, referred to 'his active career as a public official and designer of parks, county estates, and playgrounds'." (Design on the Land, the Development of Landscape Architecture, p 388).

3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure sits. For information about land owners before 1893, see Part III, Section C.

Mercer County Deeds, 188:411  
May 15, 1893, Joseph H. Bruere, acting as executor of Phebe Ann Olden's Estate, sold to Moses Taylor Pyne of New York.

Mercer County Deeds, 846:303  
October 23, 1942, Agnes Pyne McLean & John R. McLean to A.N. Spanel & Lois A. Spanel, his wife.

Mercer County Deeds, 1354:368  
February, 8, 1956, Lois A. Spanel to A.N. Spanel.

Mercer County Deeds, 1562:462  
December 28, 1960, A.N. Spanel & Margaret R. Spanel, his wife, to Spanel Foundation, Inc., a Delaware Corporation.

Mercer County Deeds, 1757:126  
May 6, 1966, Mr. & Mrs. Abram N. Spanel to the State of New Jersey.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

Masonry - Arthur Moon & Henry Fell  
Vines & Trees - Moon Company

5. Original plans and constuction: No original drawings or plans have been located. Early photographs do document that the garden's original fountain consisted of a pool with a single vertical water jet.

An old postcard (date unknown) of the "Residence and Gardens, M. Taylor Pyne Estate, Princeton" showed that below the main parterre was a tennis court.

6. Alterations and additions: At an undertermined date (most likely around 1910) the pool at the center of the garden was replaced with a large white marble fountain with three tiers of bowls; the base is supported by horse heads and topped with a figure. It was thought that this was an original Italian Renaissance fountain imported from Padua;

however, it is a 19th century pastiche. From 1936-1940 Drumthwacket was unoccupied, which left the grounds in a state of disrepair. In 1941, the Spanels had many restorations made to the garden. They had trees pruned and fed, drains repaired, and the gardens restored to their previous shape though to a less elaborate extent. This seems to have raised the entire level of the garden a few inches as noted by comparing early and later photographs. A new clay tennis court was built over the original court which by this time was in ruins, and a swimming pool was built across from it, over the spot that had been the Pynes' bowling green. The terrace walls and retaining walls were repaired, the massive garden urns planted with annuals and perennial beds were re-established. ("The Spanels of Drumthwacket," p.49-50)

Excavations and early photographs have shown that the paths of the parterre were originally covered with a gradation of river stones (possibly from the Delaware River) with buff colored fines. The paths were later paved in asphalt (most likely by the Spanels in 1941). In 1981 the asphalt was covered with "barn red" gravel as manufactured by George Schofield Company, Inc., Bound Brook, New Jersey.

In 1982, the swimming pool was filled in. The tennis court by this time was again overgrown from lack of maintenance over the years.

#### B. Historical Context:

The garden at Drumthwacket appears to be a later addition to the original estate. The name "Drumthwacket" comes from two Scottish words, "drum" a hill and "thwacket" a wood or forest similar to the English word thicket. Drumthwacket therefore means "the wooded hill." The first reference to this name occurs on the deed in 1893 when Pyne acquired the estate and early photographs show it is an accurate description of the site at that time.

The earliest structure which still exists on the site is the Thomas Olden House. The first significant structure relating to the garden still standing on the estate was built by Charles Smith Olden in 1834, and later became the central portion of the main house that lies at the head of today's formal garden. The property dates back to 1695 and it was owned by the Olden family from 1696-1863. Charles died in 1873 leaving the estate to his wife Phebe Ann Olden. Upon her death, the estate was sold to Moses Taylor Pyne and it was after then that the property underwent its most significant changes. Pyne was heir to a substantial family fortune and began acquiring more land and improving the property. He employed the services of Raleigh C. Gildersleeve as architect and Daniel W. Langton as landscape architect. Before the turn of the century, Pyne had

the Italianate Garden built and continued to enlarge the house. As Pyne became involved in the administrative fund raising activities of Princeton University, the mansion and garden at Drumthwacket served as a gathering place for family, friends, and associates. Pyne also invited local residents to enjoy the estate as a public park where they could see peacocks, deer, and swans roaming the grounds. Drumthwacket remained as a hub of activity in the Princeton area until the death of Pyne in 1921. Portions of the estate subsequently were sold off or contributed to organizations until 1966, at which time the remaining eleven acres, containing the garden and mansion, were sold to the State of New Jersey, Department of Conservation and Economic Development and the Spanels retained a 1.1 acre parcel of land containing the Butler's House.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Italianate Garden at Drumthwacket is an early example of a movement in garden design that existed in the United States at the turn of the century and lasted throughout World War I. This movement incorporated the principles of strong axial plans and defined sightlines characteristic of the 15th century Italian gardens. A foremost figure in the movement was Charles A. Platt whose work displayed strong integration of house and garden and dominated the movement until the early 1920's. This places Daniel W. Langton, the designer of Drumthwacket's Italianate Garden, at the beginning of the movement, even though he is not noted as an outstanding figure. Since Langton died in 1909, this may be his only work in that style. Langton's design embodies French and English elements on an Italian plan type. The style of much of the detailing dates back to the 15th century and uses elements in a manner similar to the Beaux Arts movement then current in building design. The main parterre design and layout is similar to the gardens of the Villa Gamberaia in Florence. "The gardens were considered notable in the early 20th century and enough survives so that the contrast between the formal gardens close to the house and the woodland and open fields can still be enjoyed." (Greiff, Constance. NRHP Nomination Form, item 8, p.2)
2. Condition of fabric: Overall, the garden is badly deteriorated. Steps and railings are falling apart at the Grotto. Balusters were cast in half sections and most are split along the joint line. Many of the balustrades and railings have exploded due to rusting reinforcement bars in the concrete. The masonry garden walls are deformed by water and earth pressure in conjunction with freeze-thaw cycles which has allowed plant material to grow through

cracks and enlarge them. Many major trees remain, but almost all other planting is missing or overgrown.

## B. Description of the Garden

1. General layout: The garden consists of a succession of four well defined spaces leading from a paved terrace (reconstructed 1983) adjacent to the major interior circulation spaces of the mansion. The first level is a seeded area defined by low walls running both parallel and perpendicular to the main house. Area measures 206' long and 52' wide from edge to mansion porch. A row of mature basswood and sycamore trees separate this space from the main parterre, the most formal level. The main parterre is symmetrical and consists of a rectangular area 160' x 98' with a semi-circular area 23' in radius attached to center of east and west ends. The overall dimensions total 206' x 98'. The parterre is bounded by a 3' high brick wall on the north end, 3' pre-cast concrete balustrades on the east and west ends, and a 3' pre-cast concrete balustrade on the south end which rests on an 8' brick retaining wall. It originally contained varied arrangements of flowers and plants located in planting beds to either side of perpendicular walkways. These walkways intersect at the parterre's center forming a circular path about a marble fountain - the focal point of the garden. Old photographs show that boxed, clipped trees were set out at the intersections of the cross paths.

About 8' below the main parterre is a less formal terrace designed as an open level parterre for varied activities. Access to this level is by double split stairs from the main parterre. Early photographs show a bowling green and tennis court. The bowling green was replaced by a swimming pool around 1941.

The grotto is situated below and within the pair of formal terraced steps at the north end of the terrace. The space is constructed of a brick barrel vault terminated by a concrete fountain with a semi-circular basin and tiger head above. Similar construction materials and current state of repair suggest that this was built as a part of the original scheme and not a later addition.

At the extreme south end of the garden, 6' below the bowling green and enclosed in trees, is a fish pond which terminates the strong axial plan. A path extends 112' from the formal terrace stairs, through the center of the lower terrace, down to the pond's edge. The pond is approximately 18' in diameter and is bounded on the north end by a semi-circular retaining wall bisected by a flight of stairs. This retaining wall is constructed of argyllite (Princeton Stone) so it is different in appearance from the

other elements of the garden. A gravel path continues in a full circle about the pond making it 72' in diameter. The survey of 1940 excluded the pond and no other photographs verify its existence prior to this date. Articles in periodic literature of the 1920's do refer to the existence of a "limpid pool" in this area, so it is probable that the pond was built at the same time as the garden, or when the fountain was replaced.

2. Foundations: Dry set stone rubble (observations made from what was visible from deterioration and other construction done on site). The retaining wall on the north side is dry set stone back-up with brick veneer.
3. Wall construction: Brick walls of common bond are set on foundation and capped by pre-cast concrete balustrade system.
4. Stairs: Stairs are located at the center of the north/south walls and on both ends of the south wall. Treads and copings are made of pre-cast concrete.
5. Parterre: Grass areas are intersected with walkways of "barn red" gravel. Excavations and old photographs show that these walkways were originally covered with a gradation of river stones with buff colored fines (possibly Delaware River stones).
6. Decorative features: Fountain - At center of garden is a recessed concrete pool of a modified quatrefoil shape 24' in diameter with a three tier white marble fountain standing 13' high and 8' in diameter.

Balustrades - running balustrades of pre-cast concrete composed of spindles and copings. Balustrade occurs on east, west, and south sides of garden and also along grotto stairs.

Urns - at the steps and corners of the main parterre are high brick piers surmounted with concrete urns 30" high and 20" in diameter planted with flowers. As documented in early photographs, freestanding urns and concrete benches were placed in the upper and lower terraces.

#### C. Site:

1. Overall setting and orientation: The house at Drumthwacket faces north onto Stockton Street. The Italianate Garden sits behind the house on the south side and is surrounded by open grassy areas, and beyond that wooded areas, with an allee of trees running east-west behind mansion.

2. Historic landscape design: The planting of the grounds was designed so that there would be a constant succession of bloom from early spring until late fall. See plan of original planting of formal flower beds. Early photographs show that a planting of sycamores pre-dated the garden and were incorporated into the allee along the north retaining wall. Several remain today, others have been replaced.

### Part III. Sources of Information

#### A. Early Views:

1. All historic photographs made from copy negatives from original prints in Drumthwacket File. Seeley G. Mudd Library, Archives, Princeton University.
2. Postcard, "Residence and Gardens, M. Taylor Pyne Estate, Princeton, NJ." Drumthwacket File, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Archives, Princeton University, n.d.

#### B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, Mercer County Courthouse 1893-1966.

Drumthwacket File. Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University. Photos of grounds, newspaper articles on restoration of mansion, etc.

M. T. Pyne File. Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University.

M.T. Pyne Papers. Rare Books, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form for Olden-Pyne House (Drumthwacket). Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton: May 8, 1975.

2. Secondary and Published Sources:

After 25 Years. An Account of the Quarter Celebration of the Class of '77. Princeton University 1877-1902, Trenton, NJ: 1907.

After 25 Years. The Record of the Class of 1877. Princeton University 1877-1897. Trenton, NJ: 1898.

Burt, Nathaniel. "The Princeton Grandees." Princeton History. #3, Princeton: 1982.



Chorlton, J. Princeton "76. Report prepared for NJ Department of Conservation & Economic Development, Division of Parks, Forestry, and Recreation. NJ State Library, Nov. 1968.

"Drumthwacket a Domicile; Morven a Museum in Future." Princeton Packet. Nov. 27, 1968.

Ferree, Barr. "Drumthwacket." Drumthwacket. Princeton: n.d.

Greiff, Connie. "Morven - Drumthwacket, The Spirit of New Jersey." New Jersey History. Vol XCVII, no. 3 & 4, p.175-190.

Greiff, Constance. "The Five Houses." Princeton History, #3, Princeton: 1982, p.29-42.

Holt & Morgan Associates, P.A. Drumthwacket's Italianate Garden. Report prepared for State of NJ, Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry. Feb. 10, 1981.

Newton, Norman T. Design on the Land, the Development of Landscape Architecture. Cambridge, MA: 1971.

"Some Notes on the Life of M. Taylor Pyne '77." Princeton Alumni Weekly. Vol. XXI, 28 (Ap. 27, 1921) p.662-3.

Spanel, Margaret. "The Spanels of Drumthwacket." Princeton History. #3, Princeton: 1982, p.48-53.

Who Was Who in America. Vol. 1, p.704.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Sources which refer to the Olden-Pyne House (Drumthwacket):

Short & Ford Architects, Princeton, NJ. The Thomas Olden House, Historic Structure Report. Prepared for NJ Department of Environmental Protection, NJ State Library, Aug. 1981. Includes complete bibliography.

D. Supplemental Material: material is attached at end of report.

Prepared by: Anita A. Bolen  
Technical Staff  
Holt & Morgan Associates, PA  
July 27, 1984

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by Holt & Morgan Associates, P.A. at the request of the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry during the summer of 1984 under Principal Architect Philetus H. Holt, III, AIA. The records were prepared under the supervision of Project Architect and Associate Robert W. Russell, AIA. Consulting Historian - Constance Greiff. Photographs taken by Dan Cornish in July 1984. Architectural drawings prepared by Anita A. Bolen at the Princeton, New Jersey office of Holt & Morgan Associates during the summer of 1984.

At the completion of this report, the State of New Jersey crated several typical precast pieces from the main parterre along with the marble fountain and placed them into storage. They are now being kept in the garage at Morven on Stockton Street in Princeton, New Jersey.

D. Supplemental Information

1. U.S. Geological Survey 1981

1:24000

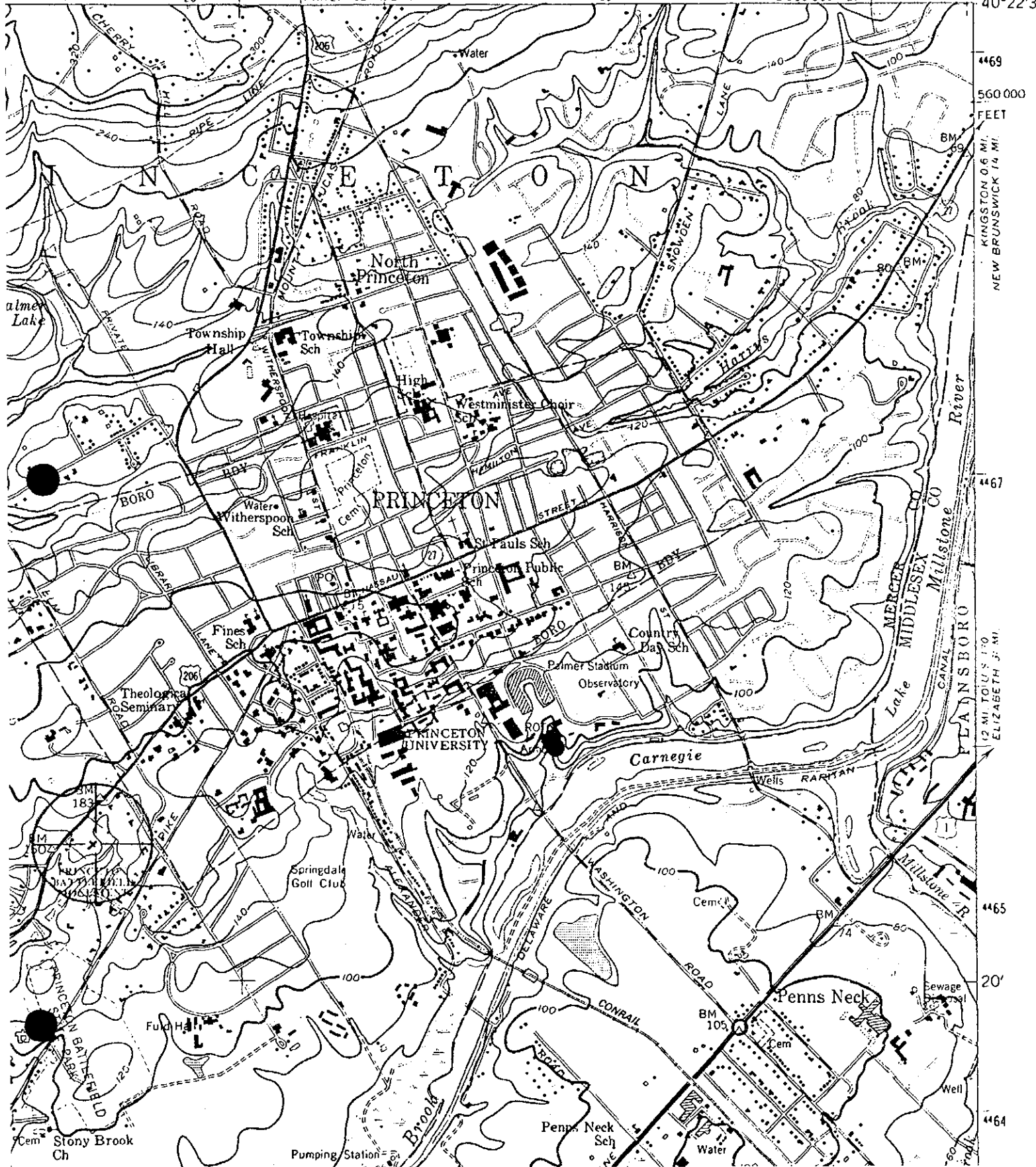
UTM 18.527620.4465260

PRINCETON QUADRANGLE

NEW JERSEY

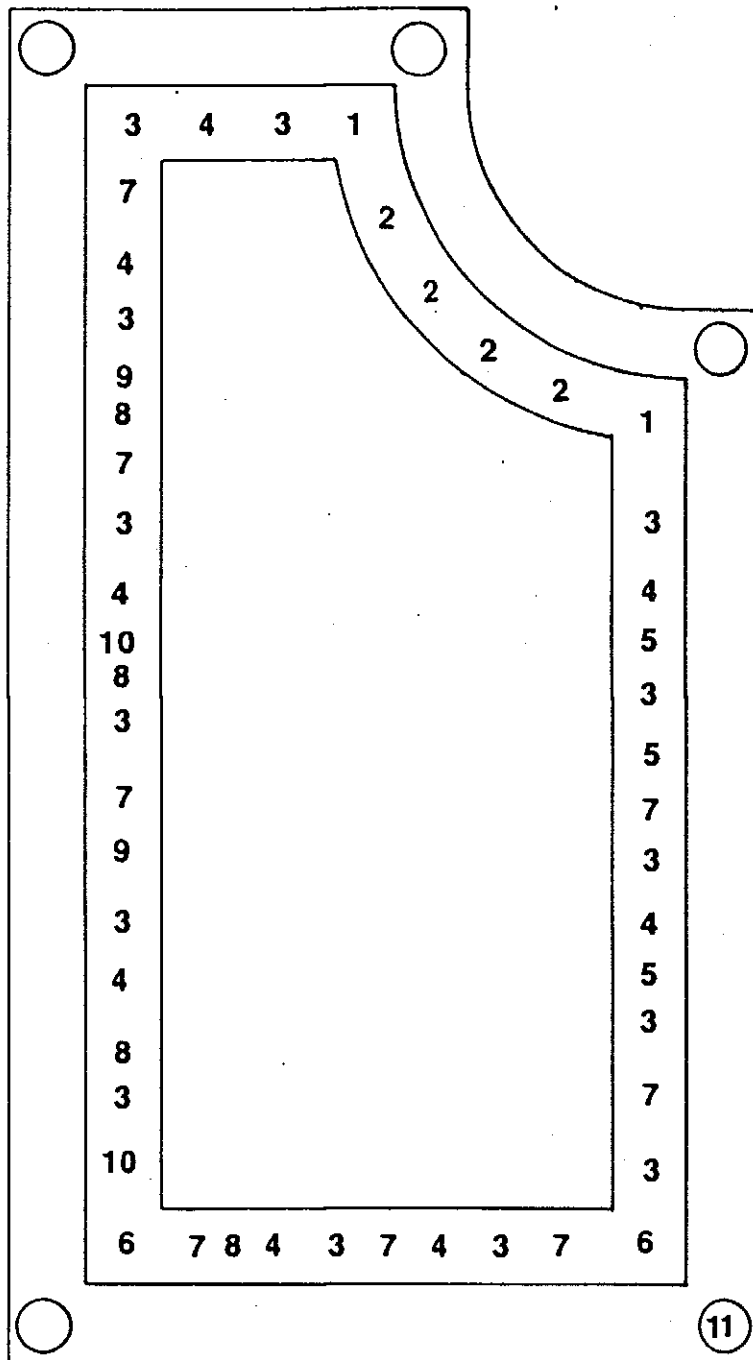
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

1528 40' 130 2010 000 FEET 74°37'30" 40°22'30"



D. Supplemental Information

2. Plan of Original Flower Beds. Drumthwacket's Italianate Garden.  
1981, p. 17.



| FLOWER |                  | IN BLOOM I |
|--------|------------------|------------|
| 1      | Peonies          | May        |
| 2      | Yucca            | Late May   |
| 3      | Delphinium       | June       |
| 4      | Canterbury Bells | June       |
| 5      | Poppies          | Late May   |
| 6      | Baby's Breath    | June       |
| 7      | Iberis           | Late April |
| 8      | Columbine        | Late June  |
| 9      | Lilies           | Late June  |
| 10     | Phlox            | July       |
| 11     | Potted Trees     | ----       |

## PLANTING OF THE FORMAL FLOWER BEDS

D. Supplemental Information

2. Quotations referring to the Italianate Garden at Drumthwacket

Princeton Press August 6, 1892

"The spacious country residence belonging to the late Governor Olden is offered for sale by the Executor of Mrs. Olden's estate, Mr. Joseph H. Bruere. There are forty-eight acres attached and the location, immediately west of Dr. Marquand's estate Guernsey Hall, is unsurpassed."

Suburban Residence for Sale

"The residence of the late GOVERNOR OLDEN, situated in Princeton, is offered at private sale. There are forty acres of land, finely located, a part covered with a young chestnut grove. The buildings are very spacious, numerous and substantial. For further particulars apply to Joseph H. Bruere, Executive."

Princeton Press August 5, 1899

"Mr. M. Taylor Pyne has purchased the farm of Mr. John R. Hunt. This farm runs from the turnpike to the Lawrenceville road, including Stony Brook within its boundaries and also contains the meadow on the east side of the turnpike bordering on the Quaker road. This additional purchase adds a large extent of land to the property already acquired by Mr. Pyne."

Princeton Press April 8, 1911

Mr. Pyne's Farm Barn Burned

"The large farm barn belonging to Mr. M. Taylor Pyne at 'Drumthwacket', was practically destroyed by fire early Monday morning. The building, which was one of the finest of its kind in New Jersey was situated on Mercer Street near Stony Brook. The fire was discovered about 4 o'clock in the morning by Mr. Rudd, who lives across the road from the building. Within the barn was a large number of valuable cattle and sheep and several young lambs, some of which were only a day or two old. Mr. Rudd, his coachman, and several of Mr. Pyne's employees succeeded in getting all the animals out of the burning structure, none of them being injured."

D. Supplemental Information  
2. Quotations (continued)

"An alarm was sent in to Princeton and the Hook and Ladder and Chemical Engine Company No. 1 responded. By the time the fireman arrived, however, the fire had gained such headway that there was little left to save. By hard work the dairy and residence adjoining the barn were saved. The large quantity of hay and grain stored in the barn was burned. It is believed that the fire started in the hayloft, but its origin is unknown."

"The barn was erected a few years ago at an estimated cost of over \$25,000. The entire building, which was of timber inside with brick walls, was gutted, only the brick walls remaining standing. The loss is covered by insurance. This is the second building down lately, the other having been a large barn on the Hunt farm across Stony Brook."

Drumthwacket n.d. reprint taken from Frances Benjamin Johnson in Town & Country

"From the public road the main drive leads through a dense screen of trees to the house-and the garden is not seen until one passes beyond the colonial doorway, through a spacious hall, and steps out upon a broad veranda, the classic white columns of which frame a series of handsome vistas."

"Across a long sweep of green meadow at the bottom of the southern slope lie four miniature lakes exquisitely set among trees and shrubbery and bordered with iris and water lilies. Two haughty swans sail majestically near a columned pavillion, giving the final touch of picturesqueness to an ensemble that is almost unreal in its beauty."

"On the outskirts of Princeton, in a matchless setting of wooded hills and undulating meadows which suggest the finished charm and restfulness of an English landscape, is found an Italian garden so perfect in plan and execution that it might have been transported bodily from the setting of some Roman or Florentine villa."

"The first terrace forms a smooth lawn of velvety green, shaded by great trees, ornamented by marble urns and benches and defined by a substantial stone wall. Ivy covered pillars which mark a wide flight of steps leading to the second terrace containing the main garden, which has a florid fountain in the center with many intersecting walks accentuated by the usual clippedbay trees. Low box hedges enclose flower beds filled with rioting masses of color and fragrance; a graceful marble balustrade sweeps in ample half-circus from either end of this second terrace and, following the lower side, is broken in the center by a charming staircase built over a small wall fountain in an ivy lined grotto."

D. Supplemental Information  
2. Quotations (continued)

"The tennis courts lie in smooth stretches on the third terrace, enclosed in high clipped hedges. A third stairway at one end reaches the fourth level which has a limpid pool of water set in the shade of laurel and rhododendron bushes and giant trees."

The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Vol. 11 189-1900, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 221

Letter of Ellen Axson Wilson to Woodrow Wilson, Princeton, August 11, 1899

"Which reminds me of my (Tuesday) morning at the Pynes with Mrs. Hibben(,) her brother Madge. It is all beautiful there now. Italian gardens oc. oc. --but oh! the lotus flower! I never saw anything so glorious! Just think how we used to rave over one at the [Allen] Marquands and then imagine hundreds perhaps thousands in bloom at once, each one larger than a magnolia flower, all shades from purest white to the most exquisite deep rose. And the motion and sound of the wind in the great beautiful leaves-- every one as large as a cradle! Two thirds at least of their large (skating) pond is covered with them."